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Committees
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Business and Regulatory Reform VC
Families and Human Services VC
Government Operations
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The Jacobs Report

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, June 13, 2003

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CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN GAINING STRENGTH

A bill passed 100-7 by the House this week would subject the state's welfare agency to stronger oversight on its supervision of children by granting greater powers to the Children's Ombudsman.

In recent years, the Family Independence Agency has been under scrutiny over high-profile cases where children under the supervision of its Child Protective Services division died or were killed. The Children's Ombudsman—designed to investigate what went wrong in those cases—was hamstrung by laws that allowed the FIA to withhold information.

The Children's Ombudsman's ability to file an authoritative report was also constrained by the ombudsman's link to FIA. Both the ombudsman and the FIA director are directly appointed by the governor.

HB 4096 would give the ombudsman substantial new powers by detaching it from the administration. Instead of a simple gubernatorial appointee who serves at the will of the governor, the governor would have to select an appointee from a list supplied by a nominating committee. The choice would be subject to Senate confirmation, and the ombudsman could only be removed for limited reasons.

The House amended the bill to make Governor Jennifer Granholm's appointee, former state Representative Lynne Martinez, subject to the new process. Her name automatically would be entered on the list of possible choices.

Under the bill, the ombudsman could now launch an investigation without a complaint. And the ombudsman would have subpoena powers to obtain any necessary records from the FIA.

180 SCHOOL DAY BILL GOES TO GOVERNOR

The Senate sent Gov. Jennifer GRANHOLM a bill that eliminates the state's 180-day school requirement in favor of a 1,098-hour requirement.

The bill, SB 364, was written to give mostly northern Michigan schools a chance to cut their heavy

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bussing costs by moving to a four-day school week of longer hours as opposed to five days of school with the traditional six hours of instruction.

The Senate agreed to two changes the House made to SB 364, the first of which requires that a school board considering going to a four-day week hold a pair of public hearings. Also, the House required that any savings a school district sees from the change be put into the classroom as opposed to being used as a bargaining tool that labor unions could use to push for higher salaries.

The Senate agreed 28-10 to send the bill to the governor after it originally passed the upper chamber unanimously on May 6. Senators James BARCIA (D-Bay City), Michael SWITALSKI (D Roseville), Gilda JACOBS (D-Huntington Woods), Dennis OLSHOVE (D-Warren), Michael PRUSI (D-Ishpeming) and Mark SCHAUER (D-Battle Creek) joined Republicans in voting to back the House changes yesterday.

SENATE VOTES FOR CHAVEZ DAY

The Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 352 this week. Sponsored by Senator Buzz Thomas (D-Detroit), the bill would designate March 31 of each year as Cesar E. Chavez day in Michigan. Mr. Chavez was born on March 31, 1927, in Arizona and died April 23, 1993. A giant of the labor movement, he founded the United Farm Workers. He traveled often to Michigan, and several committee witnesses spoke of their work with him on labor and justice issues.

In 1991, Cesar received the Aguila Azteca (The Aztec Eagle), Mexico's highest award presented to people of Mexican heritage who have made major contributions outside of Mexico. On August 8, 1994, Cesar became the second Mexican American to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States. This award was presented posthumously by President Bill Clinton. Helen F. Chavez and six of her eight children traveled to the White House to receive the honor.

Senate Bill 352 will now go before the House of Representatives for their consideration.

State Senator Gilda Jacobs represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Franklin, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak Township, Southfield, and Southfield Township. She is the Minority Vice Chair of the Families & Human Services Committee and the Economic Development, Small Business & Regulatory Reform Committee. She also serves on the Government Operations and Health Policy Committees.

Constituents of the 14th District may contact Senator Jacobs at sengjacobs@senate.mi chigan.gov or toll-free at 1-888-937-4453.

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